

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

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## Editorial

In my Editorial of Nov/Dec 1995 I said: "Finally, seasons greetings." To drive the point home I now say "Firstly, Happy New Year". May the song and sight of birds always be with us.

### The Undelivered Speech

In this issue I reproduce the undelivered speech which I had prepared for the OSI Conference in Delhi on 14th November 1995. The presence of a few non-scheduled VIPs on the dais, made me abandon my own effort for lack of time. But I do not want these "words of wisdom" to be buried unnoticed, so you will forgive their intrusion in this issue.

### Birds in Parliament

In this paper presented at the OSI Conference in Delhi from 14/16th November 1995, Dr Virinder Singh says "Birds and politics" seems to be a strange topic for discussion. But an enquiry will reveal the interesting nexus between the two — Mayur (Peacock) has mythological significance in the sub-continent, due to its association with Lord Brahma and Goddess Saraswati. It does not surprise us if it has become our National Bird. It might have lost its case, if the mythological Garuda would have been found (here). Apart from mythology, the beauty of (the) Peacock might have led to the making of Takht e Taus, which till now remains (the) most hotly contended royal throne."

Birds have been referred to either as a menace by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, because of bird hits to aircraft, or as pests because of damage to agriculture. We need a successor to Salim Ali, in the Rajya Sabha, to speak up for the dangers of a 'Silent Spring'.

### New Nomenclature

The new nomenclature under way has excited ornithologists everywhere. Nomenclature means "a person's or community's system of names for things". In short the terminology of a science. So the naming of birds includes, spellings, hyphens, capitals et al. Our community the NLBW uses lower case and hyphens for English names, though some readers, I know would prefer to use capitals for English names. What is of greater consequence is the change that is taking place in the common and scientific names of birds, and bird watchers have now become name droppers.

Andrew Robertson with his letter of 26.09.1995 has sent me reprints of a paper, portions of which I reproduce in this issue. He also warns us that "Though this has nothing to do



with nomenclature, there ... appears to be an unfortunate tendency growing for travelling birdwatchers to make exotic claims for the presence of species in unusual areas, either verbally or in unpublished lists and trip reports, which are then taken at face value by others and slip into literature without any substantiation. Once established these records are like viruses in a computer network, leap frogging all over the place, and almost impossible to get rid of with absolute certainty."

I am glad that Lavkumar Khacher and others pull up the Editor for unsubstantiated records. I am also heartened by what I heard from Sir Hermann Bondi, the famous British scientist "that to be proved wrong is not a failure; the real failure is to be ignored". Nevertheless our contributors must be very careful about their identifications.

## Peculiar Nesting Site and some Observations on the Breeding behaviour of Indian Robin *Saxicolides fulicata* Linn.



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On 25th June 1994 during a routine survey of the Goa University Campus (Approximately 15° 27' 15" latitude and 73° 50' 00" longitude) on the Taleigao Plateau relating to studies concerning avian population, the first author noticed a male Indian robin *Saxicolides fulicata* squeezing into a tiny gap at the edge of a vertical iron pipe and a white granite rock mounted on it. After the bird left the site, closer observations revealed that there was a nest with three reasonably grown up nestlings.

### Location and the structure of the nest

A half a metre pipe above the ground in which the nest was located (Fig.1), had a long G.I. pipe linked to it on the ground indicating that the contrivance had something to do with water supply. Inquiry with the engineering section and the department of geology of the university revealed that the G.I. pipe was the casing of one of the seven tube wells bored for supplying water to the student's hostels nearby. A few months before, the submersible pumpset was dismantled and usage of the tube well was suspended temporarily to

repair the pumpset. The mouth of the tube well at the top was covered by a double folded bottom piece of white glistening bag of acrylic fibre with a piece of a white granite rock to hold it in place, so that the passer-by did not meddle with the open pipe.

The nest contained a thick oval pad of coir (6.0 cm x 7.5 cm), mud and pebbles. Beneath the acrylic bag, the water could be seen, as it was the early phase of the South West monsoon.

The pipe was an isolated structure on a hard crust of laterite rock without any vegetation or shade around. The nearest patch of good vegetation consisting of plants such as *Ficus bengalensis*, *Euphorbia antiquarum*, and *Microcos paniculata* was at a distance of about 35 metres on the North- West. The pipe housing the nest was barely 8 metres away from a fairly busy metal road. On the three sides of the nesting site almost at an equidistance of about 60 metres were located the university library, two residential quarters and a building of university instrumentation centre in the process of construction. A little away at a distance of about 100 metres there were the two student hostels. Thus the site was one of the busiest of the campus.

### Observations on the nest

For three days the nest and the breeding pair of birds were kept under observation for an hour each in the morning, afternoon and the evening as shown in the Table-1. Only on the first day, the morning observations were extended for two hours and the evening observations were continued past sun set, until visibility was completely lost. The observations were carried out with a pair of 7 x 50 binoculars, from an observation post on the terrace of a nearby building at a distance of 60 metres. A long distance observation was necessary, as the knowledge of the existence of a nest is an easily accessible locality could have attracted the attention of many, causing disturbance to the breeding birds.



Fig. 1. Male parent, *Saxicolides fulicata* with collected food in the beak, perched on top of the nest taking stock of the surroundings before the entry. In the background one of the students' hostel can be seen. Arrow indicates the entrance of the nest.

Table-1 : The number of nest visits by male and female breeding partners of *Saxicoloides fulicata* and the average lapse of time between the visits

Time	Date	Male parent		Female parent		Average
		Visits/hr	Average time lapse between visits (Min)	Visits/hr	Average time lapse between visits (Min)	
Morning						
07.00	27.06.94	09	06.67	5	12.00	14
08.00 hr and	27.06.94	13	04.62	5	12.00	18
08.00 hr to	29.06.94	12	05.00	4	15.00	16
09.00 hr	30.06.94	14	04.29	9	06.67	16
Average		12	05.15	5.75	11.42	17.75
Afternoon						
	27.06.94	11	05.45	12	05.00	23
13.45 to	29.06.94	05	12.00	07	08.57	12
14.45 hr	30.06.94	07	08.57	06	10.00	13
Average		07.67	08.67	08.33	07.86	16.00
Evening						
	27.06.94	07	08.57	06	10.00	13
17.30 to	29.06.94	10	06.00	09	06.67	19
18.30 hr	30.06.94	12	05.00	05	12.00	17
Average		09.67	06.52	06.67	09.56	16.33

There is a clear sexual dimorphism in the Indian robin. The male is slightly larger and has an entirely black plumage with tiny mirror patches on the wings; whereas the female is chocolate brown without the mirror patches. Thus it is easy to distinguish the sexes even from a distance with a good pair of binoculars.

Table-1 gives the number of visits made by the male and female and the average time duration between the trips. The average total number of trips by the male and female together were almost the same i.e. 16-17 per hour irrespective of the time of the day. In the morning and evening the male visited the nest more frequently compared to the female. In the afternoon the reverse was true, though marginally. The male gathered the food on the eastern side of the nest whereas the female on the western side. While entering or leaving the nest the male perched on top of the rock piece and surveyed the surroundings, while the female alighted on the ground in the vicinity of the nest or swooped in or out directly from a distance.

#### Sanitation of the nest

Nest sanitation was carried out at all times of the day. The female was involved in the sanitation process more frequently than the male. The material to be discarded out of the nest was never thrown near the nest, but carried away in the North-West direction, possibly to the patch of green vegetation. The actual disposal site could not be confirmed as the view from the observation post in the direction of the

movement of the bird was cut off by the wall of the neighbouring building.

#### Night brooding

On the very first day of observation in the evening, the female entered the nest around 19.20 hrs and apparently did not leave. The male did not visit the nest till the watch was kept, until visibility was completely lost.

The nest was observed till the sixth day after it was sighted. Subsequently, observations were not possible as both the authors were out of station. On their return, the 4th July 1994, the nest neither had nestlings nor the adults were seen in the vicinity. The nest was intact without any sign of disturbance. Possibly the nestlings had fledged and left.

#### Discussion

*S. fulicata* is recorded to nest during April-June. The nest is reported to be a pad of grass, rootlets and rubbish, often with bits of snake slough as adornment, placed under a stone, in a hole, in an earth bank or tree stump, or within a derelict tin can or earthen pot (Ali, 1988). The novel situation in which the nest of the bird observed in a temporarily out of use tube well is worth recording.

The feeding of the nestlings is shared by both the parents. But the nest visiting frequencies by both the sexes are adjusted in such a way that the average feeding rate is maintained all through the day irrespective of the degree of involvement by either sex. Unlike in the afternoons, when both parents are almost equally involved in feeding the young, in the morning as well as in the evening the male takes care of the young to a greater degree, while the female

is busy feeding herself. This arrangement could be because night brooding is by the female only. Naturally, the female is busy in compensating for its long fast during the night which begins fairly early before dusk. In the evening the female is busy feeding herself as a preparatory step for the impending fast at night. As a result the drop in the frequency of nestling feeding visits by the female parent in the morning as well as in the evening are compensated for by the increased visits by the male parent.

Night brooding by the female and the faecal disposal at a distance in the present species are similar to those observed in the two species of barbets, *Megalaima* (Yahya, 1988). Interestingly enough, the study on Barbets, had recorded at least one instance in one of the two species, where female only performed the sanitation chores. In Indian robin nest sanitation is performed by both the sexes, but the female is more involved in the work. One reason for the faecal disposal away from the nesting site could be not to attract the attention of enemies/intruders.

Though it is not possible to comment with any certainty about the existence of territorial limits (as in the case of the yellow browed leaf warbler — Price and Jamdar, 1991),

at least no other individual of the same species was seen around in the area normally used by the breeding pair for foraging, though the Indian robin is fairly common on the campus.

#### Acknowledgement

Facilitation of the work by the Goa University, is gratefully acknowledged. Authors also thank Dr V.P. Kamat, Rector of the Gents Hostel for allowing them to make use of the terrace of his quarters as the observation post.

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Red tarsi and feet in the pond heron has already been reported about (Humayun Abdul Ali and Alexander 1952; Wesley 1993). More sightings of red-legged pond herons have been reported: Of the seventeen birds with nine nests in a peepul tree, *Ficus religiosa*, at Nalumoolaisungam between Udumalaipet, 10.6°N 77.3°E, and Pollachi, 10.7°N 77.0°E, on 22 May, 1995, seven birds had orange/blood red tarsi and feet. In the first week of August 1995 three pond herons with red legs were observed among the birds breeding in a tamarind tree on the road diverging for Kodaikanal from the main road.

The red leg in the Ardeidae reported earlier from India by H.A. and HGA (1952) and later by Neginhal (1982) and Parasharya and Naik (1987) had been observed during the breeding seasons. In the third week of August 1995, of about sixty night-herons in a tamarind tree at Ramanathapuram, 9.4°N 78.6°E, ten were reported to have had red legs.

A note in the NLBW on this phenomenon in the pond heron in Tiruchirapalli (Wesley 1993) opined that the tarsi colour was a throw-back and involved multiple allelism, polygenic quantitative inheritance and complementarity of genes. It also observed that the genes, might be pleiotropic in nature and would cause isolation of those with red legs from the others without them.

## More Red-legged Pond Herons

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The above observation on the phenomenon evoked a cautionary response (Parasharya : per. Comm.) particularly to my reference to the little egrets reported on by Neginhal (1982); "It is dangerous to believe that they were different from the main population of little egret since all the individuals of the population do not reach the same stage of breeding on a particular day. Moreover colour changes are temporary and short lived."

Considering also the recent surfacing of more red-legged pond herons at other localities, a few important surmises may be made: They are only demes of the wide-spread Indian population of the species. The coloured tarsi must in all their several shades be under the control of quite a number of alleles and must needs be combined with alleles of non-homologous genes of quantitative polygenic nature, including complementary genes. The ancestral dense red in the tarsi has been diluted through mutation and recombinations through centuries of breeding for the genes involved. It appears that the expression of the genotype in the phenotype requires an internal milieu in the hormones at breeding time. Breeding birds however need not necessarily have to change the so-called normal tarsal colour, the failure of the development of red-coloured tarsi being due to the combination of the genes being not quite the right kind for the hormones to be able to trigger them. The apparent

sudden spurt of red legs observed must be due to the right genetic combinations having occurred. However, it should be known that this combination need not necessarily happen in all of the immediate progeny to repeat the colour performance.

That there are breeding birds without having acquired the red tarsi shows that the criteria for pairing is not simply the acquisition of soft-part colours alone and that there are behavioural aspects involved. "The distinct soft-parts colouration may reflect more than merely seasonal condition within the species" (Hancock, J.A. and J.A. Kushlan, 1984), the colour differences inhibiting mating among different species and races and limiting breeding temporarily. It could be that there is sexual selection too, the colour being "brighter in the male than in the female".

Assuming that the red tarsi and feet had been a permanent feature in the ancestor, how that became seasonal is a mystery unless it be assumed that the gene responsible for the triggering of the colour genes had been modified or lost altogether and another which had been hypostatic to it, or the modified gene itself, came under the hormonal spell during the breeding season, and that in the

birds breeding without undergoing the colour change both the genes have been altered in some way so that the hormones themselves have no influence on the rest of the genes; another wild guess indeed. Any one given population of the birds in any given locality may therefore be visualised as being of individuals with genomes differing one from that of the other so that the 'paint' in one needs a 'brush' from the other for the colour to be daubed and so on, the medium being hormones.

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## Birding In Bhagalpur University Campus, Bhagalpur (Bihar)

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### Checklist of Birds of Bhagalpur University

The Bhagalpur University is situated on the southern bank of the river Ganga adjoining Bhagalpur (25° 15' N Lat. and 86° 59' E Long.) main town. It is 52 m above the sea level. Tropical and monsoon climate prevail here. The average maximum and minimum temperature are 30.49°C and 18.31°C respectively. Likewise the average rainfall (annual), relative humidity and wind velocity of this place are as follows — 96.4 mm, 71.9 and 6.35 km/hour.

There are many mango orchards, botanical gardens, open fields, tals and ponds in the university area, where birds survive under natural conditions. Bhairva tal is the largest water body which is visited by several migratory birds. In 1994 a few little cormorants and little grebes were sighted but this year in 1995 none of them turned up. Perhaps all of them were hunted for food. In spite of the large area, shelter and food available there were very few birds. Reason for this might be the polluted environment.

To prepare checklist of the birds of the university campus regular bird watching was done from January 1994 to October 1995. Identification of birds was done with the help of books listed in the reference.

### Family: Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Podiceps ruficollis*

### Family: Pelecanidae

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

### Family: Ardeidae

Pond heron *Ardeola grayii*

Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Intermediate egret *Egretta intermedia*

### Family: Anatidae

Common teal *Anas crecca*

### Family: Accipitridae

White backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

Indian griffon *Gyps indicus*

Dark kite *Milvus migrans*

Sparrow hawk *Accipiter nisus*

### Family: Charadriidae

Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

**Family: Laridae**

Indian river tern *Sterna aurantia*

**Family: Columbidae**

Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

**Family: Psittacidae**

Rose ring parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

**Family: Cuculidae**

Pied crested cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*

Common hawk cuckoo *Cuculus varius*

Indian koel cuckoo *Eudynamys scotopacea*

Large coucal *Centropus sinensis*

**Family: Strigidae**

Barred owl *Glaucidium cuculoides*

**Family: Apodidae**

Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

**Family: Alcedinidae**

White breasted kingfisher *Halcyon smymensis*

**Family: Meropidae**

Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

Blue-tailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus*

**Family: Coraciidae**

Indian roller *Coracias bengalensis*

**Family: Upupidae**

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

**Family: Capitonidae**

Crimson breasted barbet *Megatima haemacephala*

Blue throated barbet *Megatima asiatica*

**Family: Picidae**

Lesser golden backed woodpecker *Dinopium bengalensis*

**Family: Hirundinidae**

Striated swallow *Hirundo daurica*

**Family: Lanidae**

Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus*

**Family: Oriolidae**

Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

**Family: Dicruridae**

Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*

Ashy drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

**Family: Sturnidae**

Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Greyheaded myna *Sturnus malabaricus*

Pied myna *Sturnus contra*

**Family: Corvidae**

Indian treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

House crow *Corvus splendens*

Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

**Family: Pycnonotidae**

Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

**Family: Muscicapidae**

Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Redbreasted flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*

Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*

**Family: Sylviidae**

Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*

Dusky warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

**Family: Nectariniidae**

Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

**Family: Ploidae**

House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Whitethroated munia *Lonchura malabarica*

Scalybreasted munia *Lonchura punctulata*

**Family: Motacillidae**

Paddyfield pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

White wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Pied wagtail Blackbacked form

**Family: Timaliinae**

Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*

**Acknowledgement**

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## Birds of Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary

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I visited the southern part of Kerala in the first week of November. On 4th and 5th Nov. '94, I visited Tenmalai the headquarters of Shendurney Wild Life Sanctuary.

**Location :** Located on the north of Kulathupuzha valley and separated by the Churutumala ridge, on the east it is bounded by the Sahayadri range. It is situated in between 8° 5' and 8° 55' latitude and 77° 5' and 77° 15' Longitude.

**Area :** The total area is 100 Sq. Kms. of which 45 Sq. Kms is the core area. Most of the sanctuary area (about 25 Kms long and 10Kms broad) is hilly and interspread with ravines. The Kallada dam constructed across the Shendurney river forms an artificial lake and covers an area of 13.72 Sq. Kms.

**Climate :** Mean summer temp. is 33°C and mean winter temp. is 16°C.

**Terrain type :** Rugged gentle to steep slopes ranging from 90 m to 1550 m. Some of the peaks are very steep and rugged, hence inaccessible in many places. The highest peak is Alvara Kurichi about 1550 m (above MSL).

**Rainfall :** The sanctuary receives a very high amount of rainfall at an average of 3200 mm. annually. It receives both South-West monsoon (May-July) and North-East (October-November) monsoon.

**Forest Type :** It is a combination of Tropical Evergreen, Tropical Semi Evergreen and Moist Mixed Deciduous forest.

The present article is based on only two brief visits on alternate days. The headquarters of the sanctuary was made the base and Birding was done in the neighbouring areas.

### Significant Observations :

1. On the first day within a couple of minutes of beginning the birding I chanced upon a 'Birdwave'. It consisted of racket tailed drongo, yellow browed bulbul, indian tree pie, jungle babblers, scarlet minivet, malabar grey hornbills and paradise flycatchers.
2. I came across a few waterfowl like little cormorant, pond heron, cattle egret and median egret at the barrage behind the sanctuary headquarters.

Altogether I was able to record 84 species of birds belonging to 34 families. The checklist is not at all a comprehensive one, as it was prepared after just two brief visits and only a small area of the sanctuary was covered.

**Note :** The sequence of the checklist follows Sibley & Monroe's classification (as in Reference No. 3) The Nos. given in the left hand column are Ripley's Nos. Also the names are according to Ripley's usage (as in Reference No. 2)

### 1. PICIDAE : Woodpeckers

847-01	Yellow Fronted Pied Woodpecker	<i>Picoides mahrattensis</i>
819-02	Lesser Golden Backed Woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
861-03	Larger Golden Backed Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidis</i>

### 2. MEGALAIMIDAE : Asian Barbets

785-04	Small Green Barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
792-05	Crimson Breasted Barbet or Coppersmith	<i>M. haemacephala</i>

### 3. BUCEROTIDAE : Hornbills

768-06	Malabar Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus griseus</i>
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### 4. UPUPIDAE : Hoopoes

763-07	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
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### 5. CORACIIDAE: Rollers

755-08	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
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### 6. ALCEDINIDAE: Blue Kingfishers

722-09	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
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### 7. DACELOPIDAE: Halcyon Kingfishers

735-10	White Breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
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### 8. CERYLIDAE : Ceryle Kingfishers

719-11	Lesser Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
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### 9. MEROPIIDAE: Bee Eaters

750-12	Green Bee Eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
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### 10. CUCULIDAE: Cuckoos

590-13	Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
595-14	Small Greenbilled Malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>

### 11. CENTROPIDIDAE: Coucals

600-15	Crow Pheasant or Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
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### 12. PSITTACIDAE: Parakeets

550-16	Rose Ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
558-17	Blossom Headed Parakeet	<i>P. cyanocephala</i>
564-18	Malabar or Bluewinged Parakeet	<i>P. columboides</i>

### 13. APODIDAE: Swifts

703-19	House Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
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### 14. STRIGIDAE: Owls

652-20	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
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### 15. COLUMBIDAE : Doves, Pigeons

516-21	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columbia livia</i>
537-22	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
542-23	Emerald or Bronzewinged Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>

### 16. RALLIDAE: Rails

343-24	White breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
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**17. SCOLOPACIOAE: Sandpipers**

- 401-25 Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

**18. CHARADRIIOAE: Plovers**

- 430-26 Blackwinged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*  
366-27 Redwattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

**19. ACCIPITRIOAE: Hawks, Eagles**

- 133-28 Pariah Kite *Milvus migrans*  
135-29 Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*  
139-30 Shikra *Accipiter badius*  
196-31 Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

**20. PHALACROCORACIOAE: Cormorants**

- 28-32 Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

**21. ARDEIDAE: Herons**

- 49-33 Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*  
47-34 Smaller Egret *Egretta intermedia*  
44-35 Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*  
42-36 Pond Heron or Paddy Bird *Ardeola grayii*

**22. IRENIDAE: Leafbirds**

- 1108-37 Goldmantled Chloropsis or Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*  
1103-38 Goldfronted Chloropsis or Leafbird *Chloropsis auritrans*

**23. LANIIDAE: Shrikes**

- 949-39 Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

**24. CORVIOAE: Crows, Orioles, Orongos, Ioras**

- 1032-40 Indian Tree Pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*  
1036-40 Southern Tree Pie *D. leucogastra*  
1049-42 House Crow *Corvus splendens*  
1054-43 Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchos*  
952-44 Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*  
958-45 Black Headed Oriole *O. xanthornus*  
1081-46 Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*  
1451-47 White Browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola*  
963-48 Black Drongo or King Crow *Dicrurus adsimilis*  
965-49 Grey or Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus*  
977-50 Greater Racket Tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus*  
1461-51 Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*  
1098-52 Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*  
1070-53 Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*

**25. MUSCICAPIDAE: Thrushes, Chats**

- 1661-54 Magpie Robin or Dhyal *Copsychus saularis*  
1700-55 Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*

**26. STURNIDAE: Mynas, Starlings**

- 994-56 Blackheaded or Brahminy Myna *Sturnus pagodarum*  
1006-57 Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*  
1009-58 Jungle Myna *A. fuscus*

**27. PARIDAE: Tits**

- 1794-59 Grey Tit *Parus major*

**28. HIRUNOINIOAE: Swallows, Martins**

- 923-60 Striated or Red Rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*

**29. PYCNONOTIDAE: Bulbuls**

- 1120-61 Red Whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*  
1128-62 Redvented Bulbul *P. cafer*  
1138-63 White Browed Bulbul *P. luteolus*  
1144-64 Yellow Browed Bulbul *Hypsipates indicus*

**30. CISTICOLIDAE: Prinias**

- 1521-65 Jungle Wren Warbler *Prinia sylvatica*  
1517-66 Ashy Wren-Warbler *P. socialis*  
1511-67 Plain Wren-Warbler *P. subflava*

**31. ZOSTEROPIIDAE: White-Eyes**

- 1933-68 White Eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*

**32. SYLVIIDAE: Warblers, Babblers**

- 1538-69 Tailor Bird *Orthotomus sutorius*  
1265-70 Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*  
1267-71 White Headed Babbler *T. allinis*

**33. NECTARINIIOAE: Sunbirds, Flowerpeckers**

- 1892-72 Thickbilled Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*  
1899-73 Tickell's Flowerpecker *D. erythrorhynchos*  
1908-74 Purplerumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylanica*  
1917-75 Purple Sunbird *N. asiatica*

**34. PASSERIDAE: Sparrows, Wagtails, Weavers**

- 1938-76 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
1891-77 Large Pied Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*  
1876-78 Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*  
1884-79 Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*  
1957-80 Baya *Ploceus philippinus*  
1966-81 White Throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica*  
1968-82 White Backed Munia *L. striata*  
1974-83 Nutmeg Manniken or Spotted Munia *L. punctulata*  
1978-84 Blackheaded Munia *L. malacca*

**Acknowledgements:**

I am thankful to my collegemate Mr. Viju Varghese who hosted my stay in Kerala and my elder brother Mr. Saeed Ahmed for funding my trip. I am also extremely grateful to Mr. Siddique, Asst. Wildlife Warden, Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary who gave me the relevant details of the sanctuary.

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## Special address at OSI Meet, Delhi

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY, No. 2205, Oakwood Apartments, Jakkasandra Layout,  
Koramangala 3rd Block, 8th Main, Bangalore 560 034

I would like first of all to congratulate our Secretary General, Asha Chandola Saklani, for getting this organisation going, inspite of my cautioning her on both moral and practical grounds that starting a new society was fraught with danger. There is always a choice between creating a new organisation or strengthening old ones. This decision can only be taken on the basis of individual circumstances. I recall that in December 1959, when we decided to start the Birdwatchers Field Club of India and its mouthpiece, the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, there was a very angered response from Members of the Executive Committee of the BNHS. Some of them said that their membership would be seriously effected. What actually happened was that many novices who became members of the Birdwatchers Field Club, and started writing simple notes for the Newsletter, later on decided to join the BNHS as well. So long as the new organisation creates an interest among a new set of people and does not poach on the membership of already established Societies, it has fulfilled its purpose. The new term which has become fashionable is networking, and as long as members of different organisations behave transparently and honestly in promoting the objectives of societies of which they are members, it is immaterial whether there are only a few large societies or many smaller ones. The impression I receive is that members of the OSI will succeed in playing their role in increasing an interest in ornithology in this country.

One avenue which Members of the OSI must explore is to get our administrators interested in ornithology, and from ornithology into conservation in general. It is obvious that by merely having a Department of Environment at the Centre or in the States, we are not going to succeed in creating the kind of environmental protection countrywide which is the need of the hour. It is only when the key officers in our departments of Government take an interest in Nature that they will see to it that their activities, whether it is road building or dam making, setting up factories, or changing the land use of an area, do not conflict with the interest of birds and wildlife in general. I would like to mention that soon after the promulgation of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980, I wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all the States in India to find out if they had seen this document and whether it was likely to affect the policies of the State Government in any substantial manner. I remember that I received only two replies from the 22 States to which I had written, and the reply was to the effect that they had not seen the document. So, we must gear ourselves seriously towards educating our masters. Without doing so, conferences of this kind will only be a very pleasurable meeting ground for old friends and making new acquaintances.

Robert Louis Stevenson said "There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy". I think this is a profound statement and in our quest for happiness birds can play a very important part. They are found everywhere, they are such beautiful creatures with very engaging manners, and an interest in birds is bound to increase our happiness. Salim Ali used to say that the dullest of individuals - according to him the species who were only interested in making money in the Stock Exchange - would become interested in birds after a suitable initial introduction, such as the sight of a golden oriole next to a flower on a Bombax tree.

Need I say how fortunate we are in our bird life of 1200 species. And surprisingly so far very few are on the endangered list, though because of our careless and one-sided development processes, the number on the vulnerable list is increasing. There is hope, however, that because of the worldwide interest in the concept of Biodiversity, and the recognition of its importance for human well-being, the true worth of our wilderness will in future be reflected in our priorities, and in consequence our birds will survive. This will only happen when our Government in common with the rest of the world will realise that shaping and using the land on ecological principles should be our primary concern. No one has been a better exponent of this "emerging ethic of the land" than Aldo Leopold. "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect".

Birds are important members of the community on our land. We should recognise how lucky we are not to have the problem of exotic species on our hands. In many countries the chance or deliberate introduction of exotic birds have posed serious problems for local species. I understand that in places like Florida, our local birds, bulbuls and mynas, are outsmarting local residents and an immigration permit for avians may soon come into being. If we look at the flora of India we see what havoc has been played by the lantana, eupatorium, michenia and the water hyacinth. It is remarkable that vegetation, without wings, has been able to spread so far and wide. And we must ensure that no exotic birds are allowed to get a foothold in this country. I recognise that I am referring to a problem, of exotic introductions, which is one of the most complicated ones which ecologists have faced.

An interest in ornithology, and a concern for nature and the conservation of natural resources go hand in hand. The founders of the two major conservation organisations of the world — the World Wildlife Fund and the IUCN — were

passionately interested in birds: Sir Peter Scott, Max Nicholson, Harold Coolidge, Edward Graham, Guy Mountfort, Luc Hoffman and several others. This is an important fact on which we might dwell for a while. Birds are a fine medium for getting seriously interested in nature. As I have said, they are so beautiful, and their ways are so attractive that once your interest is aroused you want to learn more and more about them. Very soon you realise the close connection between different species and their habitats, and recognise the imperative need of leaving natural areas unharmed without changing their essential character. You begin to realise the arrangement of predators and prey, and become less sentimental and more realistic about one form of life living on the other, and in the process maintaining the so called Balance of Nature. The migrants should make us think about the interconnections of our world, and ornithologists, I am sure, are playing their part in unseen ways, in creating greater tolerance in the human race. CITES and its organisation TRAFFIC, will I am sure, educate people about taking the interest of other countries into account when indulging in their own idiosyncrasies. Three decades ago, an American was fined \$10,000/- for importing feathers of the grey jungle fowl for use as fishing flies. This action by Americans has certainly helped to save this handsome bird, and there are many examples of this kind.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in socio-biology. We have begun to realise that since birds and animals preceded us by several million years, they may have managed to solve problems with which we are still struggling. Family Planning, for example. I believe it is true to say that the magpie robin does not breed unless it can establish its sway over adequate territory from which it can feed its family. The number of eggs owls lay is apparently directly connected with the rodent population, and the grey jungle fowl lays an exceptionally large clutch when the bamboo flowers every 25 years, also again for the reason that food is available in plenty at that time. The white-bellied sea eagle spreads out along the coast, and chicks are driven away so that there is no undue pressure on local food resources. So birds do not breed unless they are sure of being able to support their families. In our case, the saying goes that the rich get richer and the poor get children.

"Mild mannered birds such as orioles, doves, green pigeons and bulbuls, commonly by build on the same tree as holds a black drongo's nests, thereby profiting from the bird's vigilance and pugnacity in warding off potential marauders". The black drongo is classed as kotval because it protects defenseless birds from attack against their enemies. Among jungle babblers there is an interesting case of universal aunts. More than two birds have been seen building a single nest and feeding the nestlings communally.

It is well known that birds, because of their high metabolism are excellent monitors of pollution. Birds are kept in coal mines to check on the presence of carbon monoxide. If the birds die the men have a chance to run away. In the recent attack by extremists in Japan, the Police used canaries to check on contaminated areas. We should use their unique physiology to ensure that the whole country is free from chemical pollution beyond permissible limits. The story of the western grebe is well known. This handsome bird disappeared calamitously in the early years of this century from the lakes in America where it used to breed. A study of the lake waters revealed that the use for killing annoying insects of DDT and its progress through the food chain from the smallest fish up to the bird, was responsible for the death of these birds. Soon afterwards DDT was banned in America and the western grebe has revived.

Finally I hope that during this Conference there will be a discussion about what are the sort of studies that can be made in the interest of birds and consequently in the interest of the environment as a whole. One thought that comes to mind is to study the adaptability of various species to come to terms with the human environment. We all know that crows, mynas and sparrows have decided to be commensals of man, but strangely, one hears that there is an abundance of peregrine falcons in Washington. Apparently the walls of high rise buildings is a good substitute for the crags where these falcons used to nest in olden days, and since peregrines are a protected species, they have learnt to live in proximity with humanity. Let us hope that more and more birds of our country will decide to live in our urban areas so that we can have their company.

But we do not want crows for company mainly because they prevent a whole lot of smaller and more attractive birds from living in our gardens. The crow is an excellent indicator of the degradation of the human environment. For many years, almost till the 1970's, there were no crows in Kodaikanal, and that indicated that the environment was clean and did not provide a niche for crows. Now the presence of crows in very large numbers, is confirmation, if confirmation is required, that Kodaikanal is now a dirty city. So let us think of a project where using the crow as an indicator of dirt (dirt as you know, is only matter in the wrong place), we create urban environments, free from dirt and free from crows. With a little imagination we could plan for urban settlements where we would be treated to the liquid calls of the golden oriole, and the stylish dance of the fantail flycatcher — and the absence of crows.



## CORRESPONDENCE

**NEWS FROM THE UNITED STATES.** THOMAS MATHEW, WWF, 1250 Twenty-Fourth St. NW Washington DC 20037-1175 USA

I was delighted to see the little article by my friend Ashiq Ahmad and your note in the edit of how he came to write the piece. Dear Ranjit Talwar continues his magnificent obsession with the mountain quail. I was fascinated by Rishad's piece on the world's largest harrier roost. Also, glad to see that successive generations of Prof. Mussavi's students continue to put out good stuff. This year I was able to provide a small grant for his daughter Azra Musavi at the Wildlife Institute of India to attend the Smithsonian field course (Rudy Rudran) in China.

I must confess I have not yet made the necessary enquiries about how the Newsletter can be promoted in the States. Washington DC does not have a very active birding community that I know of. But there are some good ornithologists among the WWF staff and I will ask around. I feel that it is getting to the institutional libraries which is the key.



**SALIM ALI'S HUMOUR.** S.G. NEGINHAL, No.643, 9th Main, 2nd Cross, 3rd Stage, III Block, Basaveswaranagar, Bangalore 560 079

In this Salim Ali centenary year I would like to report an incident which took place long ago.

I took Salim Ali to the Billigiriranga Hill Sanctuary and we camped at the forest resthouse at K.Gudi. The next day we went round the forest with the territorial DFO in-charge of the BRT Hills. There was not much wildlife in view but Salim Ali enjoyed walking through the primordial forests among the large trees. Upon seeing the giant Jamun tree or one of any other species, he used to stand before each tree and say "Bahut Achha Hai", and the territorial DFO also joined Salim Ali in saying "Bahut Achha Hai".

This duet of "Bahut Achha Hai" went on for quite some time and I was enjoying the joke involved in the statements. After some time I asked Salim Ali whether he realized if there was some difference in what each meant by "Bahut Achha Hai". I said that "Bahut Achha Hai" from Salim Ali implied a wish to preserve the giant trees for all time to come. When the DFO said "Bahut Achha Hai" he was calculating the amount of timber that he could extract from the trees. When Salim Ali wanted to confirm this he enquired from the DFO why he was so pleased with these trees, and as expected the DFO said there was an indent for supplying the timber of these trees to the authorities. When Salim Ali realized the

extent of the misunderstanding between the naturalist and commercial forest officer he laughed no end.



**AN UNUSUAL FOOD OF JUNGLE CROW (CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS).** BHARAT RAJ SUBBA, NMAM Campus, Biratnagar, Nepal

On 7th July 1995, I saw a couple of Jungle Crows attacking a medium sized toad. This surprised me as generally as birds hate the odour of the secretion of (the) parotid glands and poison glands. The pair – took the toad on a cemented hard surface of a roof, tore the skin and relished the flesh.



**A RARE INSTANCE OF A JUNGLE CROW EVICTING THE BLACK WOODPECKER (DRYOCOPUS JAVENSIS) FROM FICUS TREE AT DANDELI.** J.C. UTTANGI, 36, Misson Compound, Dharwad 580 001

During the 1995 Wildlife Week celebrations in Dandeli I was relaxing in the verandah of the forest guest house and had a very good view all round the bungalow and across the river. There were a few Terminalia and Ficus trees mixed with Bamboo Clump on the banks. At about 3.30 pm my attention was drawn to a black drongo, busily engaged in catching winged insects from a vantage spot it had chosen at the top of a Terminalia tree. A little later I spotted a black woodpecker in a large *Ficus glomerata* tree about 30 yards away. It was nibbling at the Ficus fruits. It was not feeding on the fruits but picking up ants that had congregated near the fruits. I could see its brilliant crimson forehead.

Before the bird could complete its meal a jungle crow started attacking the woodpecker. It tried to drive it away but the enraged woodpecker would not move. Ultimately it was driven out of the Ficus tree. It took the crow quite some time and effort before the woodpecker was driven out from what was perhaps its private territory.



**NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA.** Ms RUTH JOHNSTONE, 6, River Street, Harrington 2427, Australia

The little tern colony here started well this breeding time with 106 chicks and eggs, until disaster struck and foxes raided the nesting area and all but wiped out the entire nest area. The National Parks have been baiting the foxes with 1080 with good results. The terns have had a second nesting, but not as productive and it seems we may have 20-30 fledglings. Their nesting island of 1993 is now a sand spit, linked upto the mainland and so of course is open to more predators. Also the high tides sweep over the spit at

times and take eggs and chicks with them. Dan and I still work as voluntary wardens, keeping dogs and people away from the area. The nesting site has been fenced - but not fox proof!



**"DUCHKI" PROCESSION OF BHILS IN RAJASTHAN.**  
SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Forest Range Officer, Aravalli Afforestation Project, Jhadol (F) Dist, Udaipur (Rajasthan) 313 702

Bhils are tribals living in the southern part of Rajasthan. They are fond of shikar but a few creatures are considered auspicious by them, hence spared. Many birds like Indian tree pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Indian roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), grey shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), Indian robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*) are considered auspicious. Before beginning any work, an auspicious sign is sought by tribals. The calls of birds is an indicator of a good or bad omen. Even weather forecasting is done on the basis of the presence of birds.

"Duchki" is one of their dearest birds. A female of the Indian robin is called "Duchki" while the male is called "Duchka". On the occasion of the festival of "Makar Sankranti" (14th of January), a female Indian robin is chased in the morning till it is exhausted and captured. Its legs are tied so that it cannot escape. If a female is not available, "Duchka" i.e. male is captured. The captured bird is taken door to door in a procession and money and eatables are collected. During the begging, a symbolic reprimand is given to the house owners.

"Duchki maroo, khichdo khaoon", "Duchki maroo, khichdo khaoon" i.e. either give me some eatables or I'll kill the "Duchki". The house owners do not want to witness the killing in front of their house, hence, they offer maize grains to the leader of the procession and request him not to kill the "Duchki". The procession proceeds ahead and the same story is repeated.

In the evening the bird is given a bath in 'Ghee' and it is fed on 'Dalia'. At or near the village deity or at any community place, the headman ('Mukhia') of the village is allowed to free the "Duchki". Now all the villagers witness the bird releasing ceremony to decide the prospects of the year to come.

Situation of bird	Interpretation
1. First landing on ground	Famine year follows
2. First landing on rock or stone	Famine year follows
3. First landing on dry branch	Famine year follows
4. First flight towards south	Famine year follows
5. First flight towards north	Prosperous year follows

6. First landing on green branch Prosperous year follows

The whole day's collection of maize is offered to birds, specially to pigeons near deities and shrines.



**GLOSSY IBIS IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT.** PRAVEEN J AND MANEESH KUMAR, 14/779(2), Ambadi, K. Medu P.O. Palakkad, Kerala 678 013

Midwinter Waterfowl census has just commenced. At 17:10 hrs 10.1.1996, we were returning after taking a count at Chulliar dam, Palakkad dist. As the bus sped past the lush green paddy fields (with little water) near Muthalamada, we spotted a blackish wader feeding with a couple of little egrets. On alighting at the next stop, we retraced our path to the spot.

On focussing the binoculars, we saw a little-egret sized bird, much stockier, with a thicker and shorter neck and a long down-curved curlew type beak. The blackish-brown upper plumage had a profuse bronze tinge which glistened in the sun. As for the soft parts, the beak appeared leaden-grey while the feet were dark brown. It had neither white wingcoverlets nor a red hind crown. We moved closer keeping to the bushes and confirmed its head to be feathered. It was later identified as glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*).

Considered a rare bird in Kerala, the glossy ibis has been recorded from Katampalli (Kannur Dt.) and Kole wetlands (Thrissur Dt.). Recently Mr L Namassivayan saw one at Poongode, Palakkad Dt. (pers. comm). Hence this ibis may be a rare visitor to this district. More records are needed to confirm its exact status inside the state.

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**RED-NECKED GREBE IN ASSAM — A NEW RECORD.**  
ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY, The Rhino Foundation for Nature in North East India, C/o The Assam Co Ltd., Girish Ch. Borddoi Path, Bamunaidam, Guwahati 781 021, Assam

Recently while going through the old photo-files of C.R. Bhabora, the Divisional Forest Officer of Kaziranga National Park, I came across a photograph containing two unidentified birds. On closer examination, I found them to be the red-necked grebe *Podiceps griseigena*, an hitherto unrecorded bird of the region.

The red-necked grebe has been recorded as a winter vagrant in India. The first records for the entire Indian Sub-continent were those of Bahawalpur and Salt Range in 1967 (Handbook, 1983). Both the sites are in Pakistan. Subsequently, it has been recorded from Pong Dam reservoir, Himachal Pradesh and Nayri Reservoir, Gujarat (Pictorial Guide, 1995).

The two grebes in the photograph were in the transitional stage between their summer and winter plumage and, therefore, most of the conspicuous identification keys such as white cheeks and reddish neck were clearly visible. The birds were photographed in Haduk bee of Pobitora wildlife sanctuary (26° 15' N, 92° 03' E) of Morigaon district, some time in the winter of 1992-93 (C.R. Bhobora, pers. comm). This is the first record of the species in Assam.

Prior to that, on 9th March 1991, I observed a lone grebe in the Brahmaputra river, near Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district. It was in silhouette and hence, I could not identify it properly. It was bigger than the black-necked grebe *P. nigricollis* and smaller than the great crested grebe *P. cristatus*. Its shape also differed from both. It was, in all probability a red-necked grebe. The exact location was near the inter-district border of Jorhat and Lakhimpur (27° 10' N, 94° 30' E).

With these records, Assam has now all the four species of grebes found in the Indian sub-continent.



#### NESTING TREES OF WHITERUMPED VULTURE.

RAVISHANKER KANOJE, Forest Ranger (Kanha Tiger Reserve), At and Post Mukki, Via Baihar, Dist Balaghat (MP) 481 111

Whiterumped vulture or whitebacked vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) nests from October to March on the top of a large trees of Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) Peepul (*Ficus religiosa*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Sheesham (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and Indian Rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*) (Ali and Ripley, 1989). On 8th March 1991 I noticed whiterumped vultures incubating their eggs on the nests. 4 nests were in the Peepul and 1 nest in the Dhoban tee (*Dalbergia paniculata*), in the village Ramjeetola near Katangi town (21° 47' N and 79° 59' E) in Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh. All the nests were large enough and 15 to 20 mt above the ground level.

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**FLOCKS OF GREEN AVADAVAT IN KANHA TIGER RESERVE.** RAVISHANKER KANOJE, Forest Ranger (Kanha Tiger Reserve), At and Post Mukki, via Baihar, Dist. Balaghat (MP) 481 111

The green avadavat or green munia (*Amandava formosa*) is distributed mainly in Central India (Ali and Ripley, 1989). On 18th Sept 1972, Guntert and Homberger (1973) recorded 1 male green avadavat at Chuhari nala near Kanha (22° 17' N and 80° 37' E), the only record of this species in the Kanha National Park. On 9th Dec 1995 I was amazed to see a flock of this munia with its scarlet bill and characteristic undulating flight and its feeble cheeps in the meadows of Bithli, Piparwada, Chilpura and Supkhar (22° 11' N and 80° 56' E).

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#### Reprints and Notes

#### ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB CHECKLIST

##### Introduction

The region covered by the Oriental Bird Club contains 2,586 species (nearly 27% of the world's total), of which 7 are endemic or nearly so. At a higher taxonomic level, the families of Asiatic barbets Capitonidae and leafbirds Irenidae occur only in the region. The region has several centres of ornithological endemism, some of the world's most endangered habitats and 29% of birds treated as globally threatened by Collar et al. (1994) have been recorded; however, a recent summary of the taxonomic status of the region's birds does not exist. Many of the countries within the region have been well covered in recent reviews; however, nowhere are these data summarized. The taxonomic data for some of the less well-known countries is scattered through a wide range of publications, some dating back to the early part of the last century. This means that for many species or species groups no modern taxonomic synthesis exists. Recent checklists of the birds of the world





have generally failed to provide information on taxonomic decisions. However, a summary of taxonomic discussions and conclusions is a prerequisite to making conservation decisions, and as basis for comparative zoological studies. There is therefore, a role for a list that summarizes and discusses current taxonomic knowledge of the birds.

### Aims

This checklist aims to catalogue the species of birds occurring within the region covered by the OBC and to summarize the available data concerning their systematics and taxonomy. Although space considerations preclude exhaustive discussion of all species for which varying taxonomic treatments have been published, the text will make it apparent why a particular treatment has been preferred.

### English names

Standardization of English names has not been a major goal of the checklist, but this is solely because of the timing of publication in relation to the IOC's preparation of a standardized world list of English names for birds. There is a degree of discussion concerning which criteria are important in standardizing English names, and even as to whether such an exercise is desirable (refs). Critics claim that such standardization, in attempting to make English names perform a similar role to scientific names is undesirable as the former are a part of human culture and not science. This theoretically tenable stance confuses vernacular English names (of which there may be multiplicity for some species and regularly used in different areas) and common English names (which are already regionally standardized). In addition, many people interacting with birds lack the inclination to learn, still less understand, scientific nomenclature. This includes many amateur birdwatchers and, more pertinently, as pointed out by Pine (1993) with respect to mammals, a whole host of decision makers and implementers (such as government officials), teachers and curators of public exhibitions. Thus conservation would be materially advanced by the adoption of a stable English nomenclature. Critics concerned at the intrusion of science into language should be aware that the common English names of most birds were constructed as artificially as were the scientific names. The French have already standardized their common names for the world's birds (Commission internationale des noms français des oiseaux 1993).

King et al. (1975) discuss the criteria by which names should be standardized. Briefly, where a choice of names exists, they considered that the selected name should:

- 1a Suit the species as a whole (i.e. not apply only to certain populations.)
- 1b Accurately describe the bird (descriptive names may be loose about the colour or part of the body).

- 1c Be descriptive rather than patronymic (name derived from ancestor — ed.) or geographic.
- 1d Conform with international usage.
- 1e Reflect Indian over South-East Asian usage (as the former were deemed more familiar).
- 2a Not duplicate the name of another species elsewhere in the world.
- 2b Not be the same as the group name (each species in the group must have a modifier).
- 3 Be as brief as consistent with the above: many compound group names were deemed to be more unnecessary than useful; names of over four words were shortened; unnecessary adjectives were dropped.

When English common names were selected for this list the above principles were used (particularly 1a, 1d, 2a and 2b) supplemented by the following:

- 4 The group name should not suggest relatedness with unrelated birds; however, some outstanding problems remain, such as the use of 'flycatcher' for true muscicapids, some monarchs and allies and many New World tyrannids: the three groups are unrelated.
- 5. Where the group has only one species, a qualifier is not needed (Harrison 1986). The Mountain Blackeye is the only species in the genus *Chlorocharis* and the only species known as a blackeye: thus 'Blackeye' is unambiguous. As it is shorter than the currently accepted name, such a change is supported by Principle 3 above.
- 6. Certain names after shortening may be misleading. These include Gould's Sunbird (Mrs Gould's Sunbird), Hume's Pheasant (Mrs Hume's Pheasant) and possibly Schrenck's Bittern (if it was Von Schrenck rather than von Schrenck). Hume's Pheasant was named by Allan Hume in honour of this wife, yet the current name might imply that Hume named the bird after himself, bad form in nomenclatural practice then and now.

Conformity with existing sources is now of much greater import than it was twenty years ago when King et al. formulated their names. As Sibley & Monroe (1990) pointed out; 'the main purpose of a standard English name is to provide a consistent alternative to the scientific name in English-speaking countries'. They were reluctant to change a widely-used name to one more appropriate or useful for identification; this thinking is followed here. **It would be difficult to justify a new English name, no matter how inappropriate the existing name(s), except on the grounds of principles 2a, 2b and 4.**

Conventions concerning hyphenation, capitalization and word amalgamation need to be established for the English names proposed. Most construction issues are

resolvable under existing linguistic rules. The only clear departure from this is the capitalization of species names. A 'yellow wagtail' in English literature may be just that, but in ornithological writing the ambiguities dispelled by the use of 'Yellow Wagtail' (thus, not a Grey Wagtail, which is also a yellow wagtail), greatly outweigh the awkwardness some may feel at departing from standard English usage. Capitals are used for all major components of the name e.g. Great Eared Nightjar, Pink-necked Green Pigeon).

The construction of English bird names is subject to a number of proposed rules :

1. **Hyphens with nouns.** A hyphen is used to link two nouns in apposition, but should not be used after an adjective preceding a noun. The problem in applying this rule is in identifying accurately the status of the qualifying word. Truly apposed nouns turn out to be quite rare as bird names. Paradise-Flycatcher seems to be an example, though someone may yet discover a way of forcing it through the adjective test. Most qualifying nouns are actually adjectival nouns, i.e. nouns functioning as adjectives that for construction purposes must be treated as ordinary adjectives and which, therefore, do not take a hyphen. Thus, a snake eagle is in fact a 'snake-eating eagle', not a 'snake-eagle' (the latter implies an intermediate between a snake and an eagle). Adjectival nouns are abbreviations and can be identified as such if it makes sense to add a suffix such as -like, -sized, -billed, -eating, -nesting, -loving, -dwelling, or -driven, as in the case of Bamboo Partridge, Ground Cuckoo, Palm Swift, Grass Owl, Fish Owl, Wood Owl, Wood Pigeon, Ground Dove, Fruit Dove, Mountain Pigeon, King Parrot, Pygmy Parrot, Dwarf Kingfisher, Fish Eagle, Sea Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Snake Eagle, Serpent Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Reef Egret, Pond Heron, Night Heron, Storm Petrel, Ground Jay, Jungle Flycatcher, Bush Robin, Scrub Robin, Water Redstart, Rock Nuthatch, Crag Martin, House Martin, Bush Robin, Reed Warbler, Leaf Warbler, Ground Babbler, Scimitar Babbler, Mountain Finch, etc. The list given is deliberately long. Names like Scops Owl and Turtle Dove are more obscure but their qualifiers will probably also be shown to be adjectival.

Most of the above word combinations designate a group of species or genera and have been proposed for hyphenation in a bid to create collective names to which other, identifying adjectives could then be added. Collective names are useful, especially in making indices, but construction must come before application. A hyphen is no more appropriate here than it would be combining an overt adjective with a noun, as in Eared Pheasant, Whistling Duck, Crested Tern, Hanging Parrot, Eared Nightjar, Brown Dove, Green Pigeon, Imperial Pigeon, Bronze Cuckoo, Whistling Thrush, Penduline Tit, Crowned Warbler, Striped Babbler, and Blue Flycatcher all of which have been proposed as collective names. Sibley and Monroe (1990) statement that hyphenation facilitates indexing is negated by their

own indexing, which includes, e.g. 'DOVE, FRUIT (FRUIT-DOVE) and 'FRUIT-DOVE, JAMBU'

The case of the Eared Pheasant illustrates a common point. Sibley and Monroe (1990) use 'Eared-Pheasant' as a collective for the genus *Crossoptilon*, perhaps on the basis that a Blue Eared Pheasant might be thought of as a pheasant identified by blue ears. There is no pronunciation reason for making that assumption and application of this rule would deny them the hyphen, as in the other examples. If the bird did indeed have only its ears blue the following rule would cover the matter.

A final argument, that hyphenation of an adjective and a noun in some way shortens the name makes no practical sense. The number of syllables to be pronounced stays the same.

There is only one interpretation of this rule that makes a concession to matching English with scientific classification. This is where the English name for a group of species is made up of two other group names, neither of which technically defines the birds in question. Thus 'Cuckoo-Shrike' and 'Canary-Flycatcher', hyphenated, where the birds are neither shrikes nor flycatchers or, therefore, cuckoo-like shrikes or canary-like flycatchers. These become true apposed noun combinations, distinct, e.g., from 'Peacock Pheasant', without a hyphen, which is adjectival since the birds are peacock-like true pheasants. Other examples in the latter category are Cuckoo Dove, Hawk Owl, Hawk Eagle, Magpie Robin, Tit Warbler, Tit Babbler, Wren Babbler, and Shrike Babbler.

This interpretation raises two side issues. One is the capitalization rule in King et al. (1975), which proposes that the second word of the category-one combination in the above paragraph should take a small initial letter. A common route to its application would be where the combination has had its status changed by taxonomic revision. To cite an example, DNA studies (Sibley and Ahlquist 1990) show that Paradise-Flycatchers are corvids rather than muscicapoids. If 'Flycatcher' is to be reserved as a group name to the subfamily Muscicapinae, for classification and index reasons its continued use elsewhere might demand some recognisable change of form. This, of course, would no longer be detectable in speech and the use of a small rather than a capital letter seems unnecessary. Usefulness in indices has been a counter argument, but the presence of a hyphen (see preceding paragraph) should remove that objection.

The second side issue concerns running two words into one. There is no basis for this practice in grammar, but it would be counter-productive to challenge such long-established fusions as 'Shelduck' and 'Sparrowhawk'. Furthermore, most English speakers say Treecreeper rather than Tree Creeper, and Wallcreeper rather than Wall Creeper (no hyphen allowed as these are combinations of adjective and noun). No formal rules appear to apply, but fusions



should be justified by a pronunciation value that distinguishes them from the separately written adjective and noun. 'Paintedsnipe' and 'Laughingthrush' fail because in spoken form there is no way to detect the fusion. What appears to matter is not the number of syllables but that the adjectival part of the word is a participle. It is, therefore, proposed that no fusion should be allowed that involves a participle. Painted Snipe and Laughing Thrush are no weaker as collectives for being two words, although index compilers might disagree.

- 2 **Hyphens with adjectives.** Where a noun carries two adjectives the first of which qualifies the second, these adjectives are hyphenated. Here, it follows that the second adjective must take a small letter. Thus, 'Blue-eared Barbet' because its ear-coverts are blue, but 'Blue Eared Pheasant' because it is all blue, and not just the ears. In the latter case, both adjectives qualify the noun and are independent of one another.

Other examples of combination construction that might make for confusion are South Polar Skua and Far Eastern Curlew. As such the latter is either a Far Curlew from the East or an Eastern Curlew from the Far. Clearly, the correct version must be Far-eastern Curlew and for the first, South-Polar Skua.

Under this heading also comes the question of some group names, including Thick-knee, White-eye and Black-eye, that appear to be adjective noun combinations, invalidly hyphenated, but which cannot readily be separated or in all cases fused. In reality, they are the double adjective remains of names that formerly included a noun, or may be treated as such. Thick-kneed Plover is certain. Since one adjective always qualifies the other, for historical reasons they should be allowed to keep their hyphens.

In an attempt to create shorter, snappier versions of some double-adjective names, King et al. (1975) lopped the first ending. Thus, Spotted-billed Pelican became Spot-billed Pelican. In strict terms, this implies the bill is in the form of a spot, rather than merely bearing spots. However, it is not recommended that this decision should be reversed.

- 3 **The possessive apostrophe.** Where a proper noun ends in an 's' that is pronounced as a 'z' (i.e. non-aspirant), the possessive case is indicated by an apostrophe without an 's'. Thus Saunders' and Raffles' (not Raffles's and, clearly, not Raffle's). Where the final 's' is pronounced as such (aspirant), an apostrophe-s is appropriate; thus Pallas's.

#### Suitability issues :

This section examines some of the issues that relate to matching an English nomenclature to scientific taxonomy, including some of the ground rules laid down by King et al. (1975).

**Consistency of group names.** The extent to which English group names need to be co-terminous with taxonomic units above the species level should be a matter of common sense, treatable on a case by case basis. One of the arguments for reducing consistency is brevity. The latter has its virtues but a sensible balance should be struck between these goals. An example of a genus that would benefit from greater English group name consistency is *Phylloscopus* (leaf warbler). Even here flexibility is recommended where it would otherwise upset a neat and long-established name such as Arctic Warbler. Elsewhere, there is no benefit, for example, from the practice of dropping 'Green' from *Treron* pigeons. All species in the genus have a qualifying adjective and upholding relationships is worth the one extra syllable.

In general, perhaps, group names should be good for as large a taxonomic unit as practical, and supernumerary group names within genera should be minimized. For suitability as well as construction reasons, 'Crowned-Warbler' should not be added to *Phylloscopus* for species with a striped crown or 'Striped-Babbler' to *Stachyris* for a group of Philippine endemics. Respectively, they are Warblers (or Leaf Warblers) and Babblers, in common with congeners.



**RED DATA BOOK FOR THE BIRDS OF ASIA. AASHEESH PITTIE, 8-2-545 "Prem Parvat", Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034, India**

In February 1995, a workshop was organized by Salim Ali Center for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Birdlife International (BLI) and Birdlife International Asia Council for discussion on a Red Data Book for the Birds of Asia. This workshop is a part of the Global Action Plan of BLI to save the bird species from extinction. 30% of the threatened birds of the world exist in Asia and the list is getting longer every year.

There is an urgent need for collating available information on the status, habitat and ecology of each of these species and the various threats to their existence and also to generate data on these lines whenever required. These data are to be published as the Red Data Book of the Birds of Asia (Threatened Birds of Asia) in 1999 and will be the third of its kind, the first being for Africa (1985) and the second for the Americas (1992). The major objectives of this book are :

1. Identify and fully document all globally threatened species in the Asia region,
2. Identify the principal threats to the birds of Asia and,
3. Indicate and prioritize action for all threatened species in terms of key sites, habitats and appropriate management.

This project will succeed only with the unstinted cooperation of the Indian birding fraternity. The Red Data Book will publish the names of all contributors and sources who will help in making it possible.

*Please write to Aasheesh Pittie for forms and list of endangered birds.*

Editor



## **SPECIALIST GROUP ON STORKS, IBISES AND SPOONBILLS NEWSLETTER, JULY 1995.**

### **Letter From The Co-chairs**

Too much time has passed since the last SIS Newsletter was published. We would like to offer our apologies for the fact that it took so long to publish this issue of the SIS Newsletter.

Much regarding SIS has happened over the past year. An international forum on the reintroduction of the Oriental White Stork was held in Toyooka, Japan and an important Action Plan Meeting for Black-faced Spoonbills was conducted in Taipei, Taiwan. Reports on both events can be found in the newsletter.

Recent field reports indicate that the Giant Ibis is still surviving in the border area of Cambodia and Lao PDR. This is very exciting news as this species has rarely been sighted this century; full reports on the most recent observations can be read in this newsletter issue.

Several important meetings involving SIS have been scheduled for the next few months. One of them is a Stork, Ibis and Spoonbill Conservation Assessment and Management Plan Meeting (CAMP) to be held in Khao Kheaw, Thailand, 26-29 July 1995. We plan to use the results of this meeting in producing the first draft of the SIS Conservation Action Plan that is to be published with IWRB and IUCN/SSC in 1996. Full participation by our members will be required in the production of the action plan and we look forward to working together with you on this. Recent data on the status of SIS species occurring in your region and data on threats, recommended action, relevant wetland areas etc., will all be most welcome.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Cathy King of Rotterdam Zoo for her kind assistance in helping us prepare this newsletter for publication. She has kindly offered to continue working with us in producing further issues of the SSI Newsletter.

Koen Brouwer and Malcolm C. Coulter.



## **VULTURE NESTING SURVEILLANCE, ISRAEL**

Nature Reserve Authority of Israel is going to run a Vulture nesting surveillance project in Gamla Nature Reserve.

We would be very grateful if you could help us recruiting volunteers through your magazine, by advertising the following text :-

"Nature Reserve Authority of Israel will be running a Vulture nesting surveillance project in Gamla Nature Reserve, from February through September 1996. Volunteers are required for monitoring and recording data during nesting season."

For more details please contact :

Lia Court - Gamla Reserve manager, P.O. Box 70 Katzrin, Golan Israel. Fax No : 972-6-921733. Tel : 972-50-509930 (day time) or 972-6-763511 (evening only).



## **TOOL USING FINCH**

The tool-using finch is one of nature's rarest phenomena: a bird which uses an implement to get its food.

The warbler-like finch has no such wonderful habit but is still a remarkable bird. It is so close to a warbler in character and habit that for nearly a century it was classified as a warbler. Like a warbler, its beak is thin and pointed, and its feeding methods and actions are similar even to the point of flicking its wings partly open while hunting for food. But its internal anatomy, colour of its eggs, shape of the nest and other characteristics clearly prove it to be a finch.

Thus it is reasonably clear that all the species of finches at Galapagos have evolved from a single original colonizing form. Unusually, several distinct species are found on the same island. Thus we may have an indirect clue as to how separate species establish themselves.

Unfortunately, man's companions — rats, cats, dogs, pigs and other predators coupled with the destruction of native vegetation by man and goats threaten the very existence of the finches. One species is already extinct. Unless we act immediately, our descendants will lose an irreplaceable treasure.



**THE WHITEWINGED TIT.** S.A. HUSSAIN, No. 5, Jalan 9/5 D, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor D.E. Malaysia

I read with interest the two articles (in the correspondence column of NLBW, 35(6) : Nov-Dec. 1995) by L. Shyamal and Dr. J.C. Uttangi and the anecdote of the editor on the Whitewinged Tit (*Parus nuchalis*). I was associated with a study on White-winged Tit in Kachch,

Gujarat from 1976 to 1991 and the results were published under the title Status and distribution of White-winged Black Tit *Parus nuchalis* in Kachchh, Gujarat, India by S.A.Hussain, S.Asad Akhtar and J.K. Tiwari in Bird Conservation International (1992) 2 : 115-122. I reproduce Fig.2 of the cited work wherein 27 sightings of the Tit were recorded in different localities of Kachchh, Gujarat. The summary of the paper is being reproduced below for the information of all those concerned with the life and habitats of this threatened bird.

"The White-winged Black Tit *Parus nuchalis* is an endemic Indian species threatened by the destruction of its Acacia scrub forest habitat. Historical and recent unpublished records are here combined to provide a new assessment of its disjunct range. Only three records exist from its southern area of distribution; against this, there were 27 sightings of up to four individuals between 1976 and 1991 at 14 localities in Kachchh. The species urgently needs measures to preserve its habitat, and particularly its nest trees."

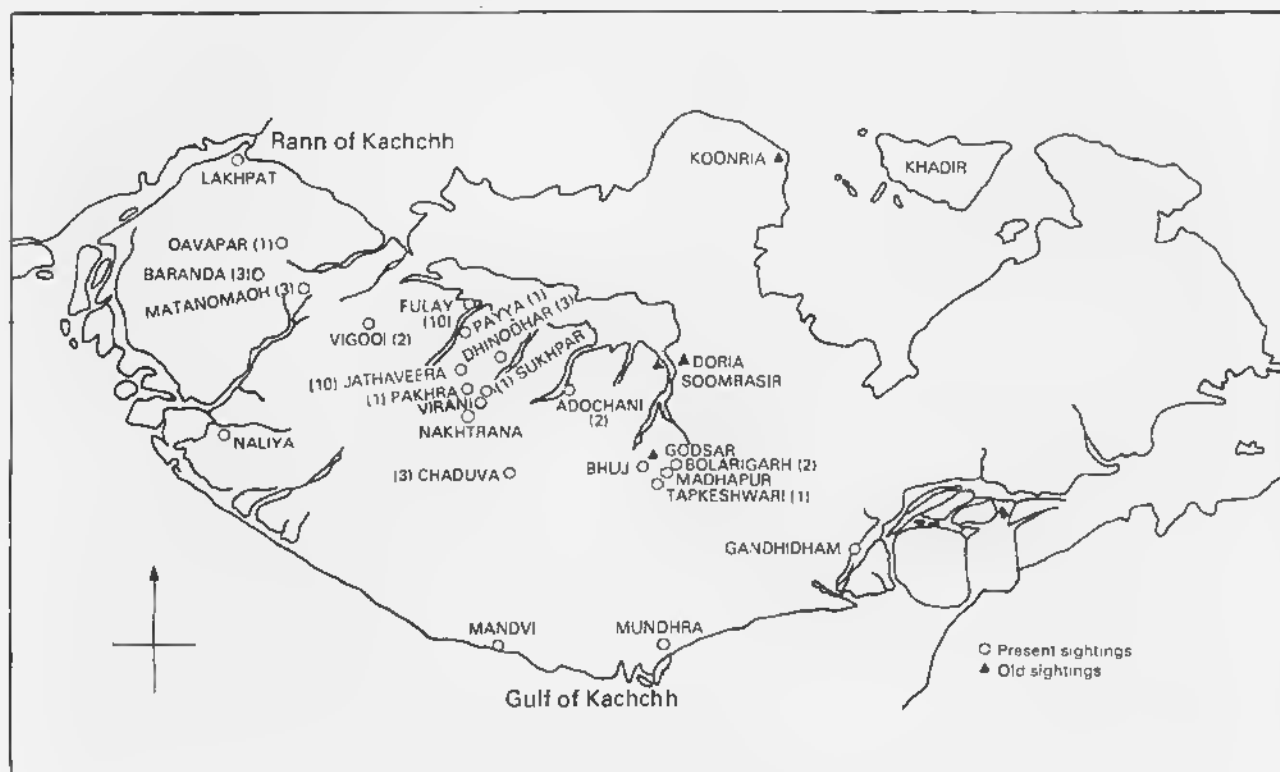


Figure 2. Sightings of White-winged Black Tit in Kachchh, Gujarat, 1976-1991.  
Figures in brackets indicate number of birds encountered.

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Cover : **Rainbow parakeet** (*Trichoglossus haematodus*). A colourful bird with long, narrow pointed tail. Found from East Indies and Australia to Vanatu. Has a distinct flight silhouette. There is a great fondness for these birds as pets and despite legal protection they are still being captured, exported and sold at vast prices.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS

**Announcement**

## **Sálim Ali Birth Centenary Celebrations**

**9 – 17 NOVEMBER 1996**

### **Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress & BirdLife Asia Conference**

**Themes : Current Status of Asian Ornithology  
and**

**Programme and Partnership for Bird Conservation in Asia**

**BANGALORE, INDIA**



**Organised by : Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History and BirdLife Asia Council**

**Sponsored by : Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India,  
BirdLife Asia and Wild Bird Society of Japan**

**In collaboration with : Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore**

Although Asia has a rich avifauna, many of the region's species are endangered. As many as 30% of the threatened birds of the world exists in Asia and are facing threats from various anthropogenic sources. In many cases, their habitats are fragmented, degraded or depleted. As the problems are almost identical for all the Asian countries and many birds are migratory, they have to be considered in a regional perspective in a spirit of co-operation. Now more than ever, it is time, for the conservationists and ornithologists to sit together and take stock of the situation and come out with time bound concrete schemes for action.

The Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) an autonomous national centre funded by the Government of India, and the BirdLife Asia Council, *in commemoration of the Birth Centenary of the late Dr. Sálim Ali, the doyen of Asian Ornithology*, are offering an unique opportunity for the above by organizing the First Pan Asian Ornithological Congress (PASOC) and the BirdLife Asia Conference from 9 to 17 November 1996 at Bangalore, the 'Garden City of India'.

#### **Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress (PASOC)**

The PASOC will evaluate the current status of ornithological research in Asia and identify gaps as at meetings of Neotropical Ornithological Congress and Pan African Ornithological Congress. The Congress will highlight regional ornithological issues and give impetus and guidelines for future research.

Seminars, poster sessions, round table discussions and workshops will be organized on the following topics at the PASOC.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a) Ecology and conservation of birds of tropical forests of Asia | g) Annual cycles and breeding strategies of birds |
| b) Ecology and conservation of wetlands of Asia and their birds. | h) Co-operative breeding in Asian birds           |
| c) Arid zone bird ecology  | i) Systematics                                    |
| d) Bird migration  | j) Zoogeography                                   |
| e) Avian physiology  | k) Host-parasite relationships                    |
| f) Economic ornithology  | l) Ecological genetics.                           |

Those who are interested to hold round table discussions should send in the theme.

#### **BirdLife Asia Conference**

The BirdLife Asia Conference is held every four years, the last being in Seoul, South Korea in December 1992. The Conference in Bangalore will bring together BirdLife Partners, Representatives, staff and collaborators to review and develop the BirdLife Asia Programme, and strengthen the network of organizations and individuals working for conservation of birds and their habitats in the region. The Conference will include presentations on existing and future BirdLife Asia projects, as well as training courses, poster presentations and workshops on priority conservation and institutional development issues.

*For Further Details Contact :*

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